

Maharashtra

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(Published in The Garland Encyclopedia, Edi. Alison Arnold, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York, 2000)

Tribal Music

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The Indian state of Maharashtra is over 307,000 square kilometers in size and has natural borders on all four sides. To the north, the Narmada river flows west, marking the northern limit; the river Vainganga approximates the eastern border, along with the Deccan plateau, which levels off toward the east; the Sahyadri mountain ranges taper off in the south, forming the southern border; and to the west lies the coastline of the Arabian Sea. The Sahyadri ranges, running north-south for about 640 kilometers, also bifurcate Maharashtra into two distinct climatic regions: the lowland coastal strip known as Konkan, which enjoys a temperate climate, and the Deccan plateau known as Ghat or Desh, which extends to the east of the range and whose climate is more extreme.

Annual rainfall in Maharashtra markedly affects seasonal and agricultural cycles, and thus life-cycle celebrations and the associated musical events. The monsoon rains normally occur from June to September, with higher rainfall in the south. The copious water in one season and virtual absence of it in others directly affects agricultural work, which in turn affects the frequency and spacing of festivals. The number of festivals is in inverse proportion to the intensity of agricultural activities; of the thirty-odd festivals and ceremonial occasions that include musical performance, one third take place during the months-long rainy season.

Another geographical factor of cultural importance is the state's location within India, roughly midway on the country's north-south axis; repeated Puranic and epic references to Maharashtra as dakshinapatha 'the region in the southern path' show that this perception is an old one. People coming from the north and moving southward invariably lost momentum by this point, and tended to settle down in the region. Similarly, those arriving by sea frequently took up residence in Maharashtra. The state

now borders two of the four South Indian states that are repositories of Dravidian culture, and has long been a meeting place for Aryans and Dravidians as well as for other indigenous and alien peoples in all historical periods. From ancient and Puranic times comes the story of Agasti, the first Aryan sage to secure a firm footing in non-Aryan territory south of the Narmada river and who accomplished this by establishing a settlement in Maharashtra. The later Islamic wave from the north stabilized in Maharashtra and ruled there from 1347 to 1630, unable to penetrate deep into the south for long. Then in the nineteenth century, British power could not subjugate the Marāṭhās until 1819, a fact indicative of the long duration of that confrontation.

Seven major world religions are practiced in the state; among the majority Hindu population, devotees worship not only the chief gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, but also more than fifty village deities.

Three of India's twelve largest cities-Bombay, Pune, and Nagpur - are located in Maharashtra, with twenty-five other cities located in the state. This relatively high urban profile affects musical culture, which includes a greater variety of art and popular music than many other Indian states. With Bombay at its center, Maharashtra has become a unique melting pot of diverse cultural identities, and this is very much reflected in its music.

TRIBAL MUSIC

The prominent tribes in Maharashtra - the Agari, Bhil, Mahadev Koli, Gond, Warli, Kokana, Thakur, Gavī, Kolam, Korku, Andh, Malhar, and Pardhi-are concentrated mostly in the districts of Khandesh, Colaba, and Nasik and in parts of Pune and Ahmadnagar. Most music-making occasions among these groups involve dancing by both men and women. The tarapi and ghor-nāc of the Warli, and the Ganesh and Holī dances of the Agari are well known. All important life-cycle events such as childbirth, initiation, marriage, and death, as well as seasonal and agricultural cycles, have music associated with them.

The collective expression of music and dance among Maharashtra tribes, as among tribal groups in other Indian states, demands perfect synchronization of steps, movements, and vocalizations. It also features a hypnotic repetitiveness of patterns and timbres.

Tribal music employs instruments with loud, sharp tones and a clear sonority, such as small flutes, drums, and idiophones with sharp struck and scraped sounds. They are generally made from readily available inexpensive materials such as bamboo, hide, gourd, clay, and leaves. Instruments fashioned out of these materials in Maharashtra include the forked and jingling bamboo sticks, the tarpe 'aerophone with two gourd resonators', a rare scraped membranophone known as dera 'clay pot with covered mouth', thāl 'metal plate and scraping rod' that creates a hypnotic drone, and ghunḡhrū 'ankle bells'. For some tribes, musical instruments have a mythological significance: the Agari, for example, who are also known as the Ḍhol-Agari, claim that they were drummer-musicians to Ravana, the demon-king in the Ramayana.

FOLK MUSIC

Folk music refers not only to songs but also to the choreographic and histrionic elements that usually accompany them in performance. About sixty song types are current in the state, ranging in nature from sound effect to song, from movement to dance, and from routine action to dramatization. The following describes some of the folk-music genres of present-day Maharashtra.

Nandiwālā

A Nandiwālā is a specialist performer who gives animal-training shows in villages, using sound effects as music. Combining tricks with some soothsaying, the Nandiwālā employs a gubgubī 'double-headed, scraped membranophone', a ghadyal-tirpu 'metal disc struck with a mallet', and tiny bells. Rhythmic playing, controlled verbalization, and loud thumping and scraping constitute the musical performance. After the show the performer asks for alms.

Bahurūpi

The performances of a Bahurūpi (literally 'one with many disguises') - a professions male entertainer who parades in different disguises and in return asks for alms- are examples of dramatized song. Bahurūpis are avowed devotees of the cult deities Bahiroba, Khandoba, Jakhai, and Janai and are widely known for composing humorous marriage proposal songs. Impersonations of females, pregnant women young mothers, and so on form the dramatic repertoire. Song verses are full of rhymes and assonance; the Bahurūpi recites them in quick tempo without instrumental accompaniment.

Dhangari ovyā

These movement-oriented songs are associated with goatherds, even though the word *dan* derives from the Kannada term for cattle. They center on *Biruba*, an incarnation of Lord Shiva. According to the associated myth, many flocks of sheep once emerged from an anthill and began destroying standing crops; *Biruba* was approached for redress, and created the *Dhangars* (herdsmen) to protect the crops. *Dhangars* worship the folk deity *Biruba* and sing *dhangari ovyā* songs about his exploits.

In an open-air *dhangari ovyā* performance, colourfully dressed *Dhangars* dance around players of a huge *dhol* 'cylindrical drum' and execute vigorous movements known as *gaja nritya*. Broad, forceful rhythms, emphatic stanza endings, and powerful voice projections characterize the genre.

Vāsudev git

This genre exhibits elements of both dance and melodic solo singing. The performer represents *Vasudev*, an incarnation of Lord Krishna. He wears ankle bells and a distinctive peacock feather headdress, and plays the flute. He also sings, accompanying himself with a hand-held pair of cymbals (*mañjirā*), and executes nimble, delicate dance steps and whirling dance movements. Such an itinerant singer performs in house courtyards in the mornings and asks for alms.

Vaghya-Murali git

These songs form a sub variety of *gondhal*, a ritual theatre form. The characters in the play, *Vaghya* and *Muralī*, are male and female devotees of the deity *Khandoba*, respectively. In the performance, known as *jāgaran* 'keeping awake', *Murali* is the chief dancer and *Vaghya* is her accompanist. The performance is distinguished by *Murali*'s graceful and nimble dancing, her attractive and neat costume, and the pervasive, sensuous sophistication of her movements. The accompanying instruments are the *tuntune* 'one-stringed chordophone', which provides both rhythm and drone, *khanjiri* 'frame drum', *ghol* 'small bell', and ankle bells. Use of nonsense syllables and melodic phrases approximating ragas affirm the musical ambitiousness of this song type.

DEVOTIONAL MUSIC

The doctrine of bhakti (devotion) has been important in India since the fourth century, but specific musical styles inspired by devotional cults have existed only for about five hundred years. Poet-saints of each region have composed thousands of songs in regional languages and have passed them on orally.

Certain musical characteristics have allowed the continued performance of these songs by people at all levels of society. First, the performance of devotional music encompasses chanting, recitation, and singing, both solo and choral. Second, performers employ instrumental resources judiciously. The one-stringed drone vina provides melodic support, while the mridang 'double-headed barrel drum', tāl 'cymbals', and ciplā 'clappers' (wooden strips with inserted metal rings) provide rhythm. Rhythmic cycles of four and eight beats are common.

Devotional music genres such as bhajan, kirtan, sankīrtan or gāyan use different musical resources in varied combinations. Among the variety of other devotional forms in Maharashtra are marriage songs sung by women (dhavale), poetic songs to the deity Vitthal (abhañg), devotional songs about Krishna and the milkmaids (gaulan), a semi-religious dramatic musical performance (bharud), hymns of praise (stotra), collective singing in praise of a deity (āratī), devotional songs sung solo or in groups (karunashtak), Sanskrit couplets or hymns of praise (śloka), unaccompanied women's folk songs and devotional songs (ovi), a prosodic form set to a simple tune and quick rhythm (katav), and devotional songs about the separation of the beloved/devotee from the lover/deity (virani).

POPULAR MUSIC

Maharashtra's importance in Indian popular music cannot be overestimated in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Metropolitan Bombay (now known as Mumbai) is a transcendent center of cosmopolitan activities in music, as it is in all cultural areas. Composers and producers of film music and other mass-mediated music, the two weighty components of the popular category, have found conditions in this city conducive to popular-music production. Of the four major Indian film-producing centers, two are in Maharashtra-Pune and Bombay. Bombay has also been significant in the history of Indian broadcasting and television. Though Maharashtra's heritage in

popular music includes contributions in Hindi and other languages, the present discussion is restricted to Marathi works.

Beginning in 1843, a genre of Marathi theater developed that is usually described as music drama (*sangītnātak*), although it was distinct from opera, musicals, and other existing forms combining music and theatre. Its popularity led to the establishment of many theatre companies. Authors wrote, adapted, and translated five-act plays; songwriters wrote between ten and two hundred songs for each music drama; producers invited composers-usually top-ranking vocalists from the Hindustani art music tradition-to select tunes; actor-singers received training from a young age; and touring drama companies gave hundreds of performances, traveling even into the interior of the state. Stage music in the nineteenth century paralleled the earlier achievement of devotional music genres in spreading musical literacy among the populace¹.

The beginning of sound feature film production in India in 1931 led to the rise of Indian cinema and film music. Between 1931 and 1991, about 931 Marathi films were produced, most of them included several songs, which would become easily available through audio recordings, radio broadcasts, and (more recently) television and video cassettes. The introduction of the playback technique (dubbing studio-recorded singing into a film) in the mid-to-late 1930s brought about a revolution that remains in effect today; it became the norm for the actors' voices to be replaced during songs by those of new professionals from different cultural and performing backgrounds; this development added new singing-voice textures, intonation patterns, and dialects to the final product.

A concurrent development in popular music was the emergence of *bhāvgīt* 'songs of emotion'. These were topical in theme and combined many musical styles both Indian and foreign, employed fresh voices, introduced many instrumental colors, and were aimed at heterogeneous audiences with varied musical tastes. They generally depended on the new mass media for their presentation. The *bhāvgīt* genre reigned supreme from 1931 to about 1955, and continues to evolve today in a changing media and cultural environment.

¹ Ranade, Ashok. (1986). *Stage Music of Maharashtra*. Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi.